

Derwentside District: Provision of covered walkway, draught lobby, access ramp, car parking area, fencing and associated works at Tanfield Lea Junior and Infant Schools, Tanfield Lea, Stanley (Regulation 3).

Introduction

- 1 The County Council is proposing to amalgamate the existing Junior and Infant Schools, located on a single site to the south east of King Edward Street, Tanfield Lea (see attached plan). A series of external works are proposed as part of the amalgamation in order to provide increased integration, security, the safe provision of car parking and to allow the premises to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act requirements. One of the buildings on the site incorporating the 'Activity Den' is currently leased to Tanfield Lea Community Association.

The proposal

- 2 The proposal involves installing an access ramp at the main entrance, a covered walkway between the infant and junior buildings, the creation of a new parking area, construction of a draught lobby, gate and fence alterations and the provision of a bin storage area.
- 3 The proposed access ramp would form part of the revised access arrangements on the south eastern side of the junior school. The ramp would run at a gradient of 1/16 rising to 1.8m above ground level at its highest extent. It would extend 9m across the south east elevation of the building and would project 4.1m from the main wall. Materials would consist of concrete and brick with steel railings attached although details of colours and finish are yet to be confirmed.
- 4 The proposed covered walkway would extend over a length of 81m from the south east corner of the junior school building, across a playground to the infant school. This would be constructed in steel with a mono pitch roof finished with clear view polycarbonate panelling. It would generally have a height of 3.2m and width of 2.4m. Two small trees would be removed to facilitate construction of this structure.
- 5 The single storey extension to form a draught lobby would also be located on the south eastern side of the junior school building. It would be constructed in artificial stone and would have a flat roof to fit in with the existing elevations. It would measure 2.1m in height and 2.8m by 2.8m in width and depth and would form part of the new access route through the junior school.
- 6 The creation of additional car parking bays on the north western aspect of the junior building would involve the removal of a wall, a fence and the extension of an existing hard standing area. There are currently 16 official parking spaces in place at the site although these do not all meet layout standards. The proposal would increase this number to 19 including 3 accessible spaces. A proposed path would link the car park to existing footpaths between the school buildings.
- 7 A proposed 1.8m high fence would separate the playground area from the new parking facilities at the north west of the site. On the south east boundary it is proposed to erect a new 1.8m high fence and

increase the height of an existing wall to 1.8m. Also proposed is the erection of a fence with heights varying between 1.8m to 3m with the inclusion of two gates to the north western side of the site.

- 8 Other minor works include the relocation of the bin area. This area would be positioned in the south eastern corner of the site and would be enclosed by 1.8m high wooden boarded gates and timber fencing.

Consultation and representations

- 9 Derwentside District Council has no objections to the proposal.
- 10 The application has been advertised on site and one letter of objection to part of the proposals has been received on behalf of the 'Board of the Activity Den'. Concern is expressed that there is no segregation of pedestrian and vehicular access within the proposed car parking layout and this will pose risks to pedestrians. It is requested that a pedestrian walkway be installed and parking spaces be relocated to facilitate this. It is also felt that a low fence to separate pedestrians and vehicles should be installed. An alternative car parking arrangement to increase the number of spaces on the site is also suggested.

Comment: The applicant does not wish to change the car park layout in the manner suggested. However, amended access arrangements in the car parking area are proposed. A fence (1.8 metres high) with controlled gates would be constructed on the south side of the car park to cut off this route to pedestrians accessing the school and community centre. An alternative route using the pedestrian access from the main road would be retained. Fob keys for the controlled gate would be issued to key personnel at the Activity Den and a disabled parking bay would be provided in the car park adjacent to this building. Car parking at the school would be available for community purposes outside school hours. The proposed arrangement is considered acceptable by the County Council's Health and Safety Unit. The Activity Den has been notified of these changes and provided with a copy of the revised plan. Formal comments on what is now proposed are still awaited.

Planning comment

- 11 The proposal involves development on various parts of the site in order to support the amalgamation of the junior and infant schools. The Derwentside District Local Plan contains policies relevant to the proposed development. Policy GDP1 relates to general development principles, CF5 relates to disabled access and CF2 relates to the layout and design of new facilities.
- 12 The principle planning issue in this case surrounds parking and access arrangements. The proposed modifications would concentrate car parking in one area and would meet adopted standards in terms of layout and accessibility. The changes would improve the overall parking position, easing existing difficulties and ending informal patterns of parking that have developed over time because of space restrictions. The new arrangement is therefore considered acceptable and would achieve an increased degree of separation between pedestrians and vehicles. Although existing access routes to the Community Centre would be modified the current arrangements do not

provide sufficient segregation between different site users and are not ideal in security terms. The new arrangements would rectify this position and make reasonable provision for users of the Activity Den.

- 13 The access ramp situated on the south east elevation of the school would be visible from the road to the front of the school. However, it is considered that it would relate acceptably to the school building, would not be intrusive and would enable DDA compliance to be achieved. The space where the ramp is proposed to be placed is currently used for informal parking purposes. The installation of the ramp and the relocation of the parking facilities to the north west of the site would allow the creation of a safer main entrance to the amalgamated school and the formation of a priority disabled bay next to the access ramp.
- 14 Houses situated on King Edward Street on the north west side of the site overlook the school. It is considered that the proposed changes on the north western side of the school would not have any significant negative effect upon residential amenity. The creation of additional car parking spaces would take place a minimum 22 metres from the surrounding properties and would be at a lower level. The proposed fence including gates and covered walkway, at their closest points would be 28 metres from neighbouring properties.
- 15 The draught lobby to be provided on this side of the site would have limited visual impact. The proposed design and materials would be in keeping with those of the host building. This part of the site is bordered by wooded parkland that would largely screen the extension. The increase in the height of fencing enclosing this part of the site boundary would also reduce views into this area.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 16 The proposed works are intended to improve safety and access at the school. They are relatively minor in extent and would have limited impact outside the site. Although the car park and new fence line would replace an existing route into the community building users would still be able to access the building from the main entrance at the front of the site and from the car park when the school is not in use. These arrangements would not have a negative effect upon health and safety at the site. I therefore **recommend** that planning permission be granted subject to relevant conditions concerning details of materials.
- 17 The development would accord with Policy GDP1 of the Derwentside District Local Plan and would be in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. The proposed form, layout and materials are appropriate to the site location and would not adversely affect the amenities of neighbouring occupiers and land users and the sites own users. The development would also provide for disabled access in accordance with Local Plan Policy CF5.

No departure

Background Papers: Application, consultations and responses, site location plans.

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